May 10, 1900. — 2 m. — 9 13.75 — Willett.

MRS. ASHMEAD'S BUREAU DRAWER

Literature Department of the
Woman's Board of Home Missions of the
Presbyterian Church
156 Fifth Ave., New York City, N. Y.

Mrs. Ashmead's Bureau Drawer.

"How did it come about? Well, a bureau drawer and a dream were the cause, I think," said Mrs. Ashmead; and then as Mrs. Stowe opened her big blue eyes wide in interest and astonishment she added:

"Of course, dear, it was the Lord who brought it all about, but the bureau drawer and the dream were the instruments he used to show me what a sinful, wicked, selfish woman I was getting to be."

"Mrs. Ashmead! You a sinful, wicked, selfish woman! Why, only yesterday I told John that you were one of those saintly women that I believed were born good, and that if ever I were half as good as you are I should feel certain that I was getting ready to die. But I do wish you would tell me what the bureau drawer has to do with your being so terribly in earnest about this matter."

Mrs. Stowe had recently come to be next door neighbor to Mrs. Ashmead. She was young, lovable and enthusiastic about whatever interested her. On this particular afternoon she had run over for a chat with her neighbor and found her as much absorbed in her last missionary magazine as Mrs. Stowe would have been in a novel, and then it was that she asked her how it all came about, and easily persuaded her friend to tell her.

"Twelve years ago," said Mrs. Ashmead, "we were living in the little town of Ferndale. A very cosy home we had and I took great pride in keeping it nice. Indeed, I had the reputation of being the best housekeeper in town. They used to say that one could never find a particle of dust in our house

from cellar to attic. I did a good deal of sewing for the children, and what with housework, sewing and reading a little, I was kept busy. On the whole, I was well satisfied with myself and my family. We always went to church and Sunday school, and I never thought of missing prayer meeting. I went to the ladies' sewing society and twice a year had it at our house and gave them a good time, if I do say it, and always had the men come to supper.

"Our church was small, but we all loved each other and loved our pastor too. (Dear, saintly man, he went to his reward ten years ago.) There was just one branch of church work that I never cared much about, and that was the ladies' missionary society. In fact most of our ladies felt the same way. Once in a while I used to go to the meetings, but it really seemed as though I couldn't spare the time. I eased my conscience by contributing to the cause, and it would have shocked me if husband had once neglected to pray in family worship every Sabbath morning for 'the dark places in our land' and for the 'isles of the sea' but we hadn't either of us any idea just where those places were or which of the isles of the sea were receiving gospel light, and as for knowing a single missionary by name, why, we never thought of it.

"One Sabbath Mrs. Hamilton, president of our missionary society, said to me: 'You'll come to our missionary meeting this week, won't you?' I thought at once of some of my spring cleaning that *must* be done and of Ida's two new dresses to be made, but I didn't like to say I was too busy, for I had made that excuse often before, so I answered, 'Yes, if I can;' but I'm sure I didn't say it as I would if it had been an invitation to an afternoon or evening social gathering. She looked disappointed. I could not get her look out of my thoughts all day, and I think I was a little ashamed to feel way down in my heart that I really did not want to go to the missionary meeting and was glad of an excuse to stay away. Monday the subject came into my

thoughts persistently and continually. It would not down. Tuesday morning Ida came to me and said:

"'Mamma, I just must have a larger bureau. Mine has been more than full for a long time and now there are so many things that I can't get my top drawer shut.'

"'Let's look at it,' I said. Ida began to pout a little for she knew that I had talked a good deal about her lack of order and she never felt very proud to have me make tours of inspection as I sometimes did. Ida was my only girl, and it was quite a trial to me that she took so little care in keeping her room properly.

"'You are neat, dear,' I had said many times, 'but, you are not orderly, and you *must* learn to be more tidy, or you'll never make a good housekeeper.'

"I looked at the drawer. I had never seen it in such confusion before, and I sighed in discouragement as I said:

"'Ida, you are getting more careless every day. Instead of improving you are going back; when, *when* will you ever learn to do things well?'

"'I don't see how I can help it if I don't have half room enough,' said Ida.

"'All the more need of system, my child. But let us see how much room you need. Take everything out and we will re-arrange the drawer.'

"Out they came on the bed. There was a good deal of rubbish, soiled ruches, frayed collars, handkerchiefs that belonged in the laundry bag, scraps of paper covered with algebra examples, Latin exercises and the like. They made together a big pile at the foot of the bed. Ida was quiet and I think ashamed. Then we put back just what belonged in the drawer, some things in boxes, some folded neatly in piles. It took us a good half hour, but when we finished Ida said:

"'What a difference it makes, mamma! Throw away the rubbish and arrange what is left with some system and there is plenty of room. I'll see how long I can keep it as nice as it is now.'

"I was encouraged, as I always was when the good resolutions were made. That night I was unusually tired from extra cleaning and sewing, but I couldn't sleep. Everything that had occurred during the day kept coming up in my mind. I thought about Ida and wondered if she really would grow more orderly. I hoped that I could be wise and patient in dealing with her; and then I thought of the missionary meeting which was to be the next day and wondered if I ought not to go. I hadn't been present for at least five months; perhaps it had been longer, I wasn't sure. Why had I been absent so long? something seemed to question almost sternly. I went over, sleepily, all my old arguments: Can't do everything; it would be different if we were rich and kept a servant to relieve me. Then one day it had rained; then I had had a good deal of extra company. How could I belong to the sewing society and the missionary society and keep my house neat and sew and attend to my home properly? It was surely too much to expect. Why, though, must I be bothered by this uncomfortable feeling? If it were right for me to stay at home why was not the question settled—why must it constantly vex me, *me*, Mrs. Ashmead, who everyone knew tried to do her duty and her share of everything? At any rate I had kept my dues paid promptly and I tried to console myself with that thought. 'Dues are not you, dues are not you,' seemed to sound in my ears.

"At last I fell asleep. Whereupon an apparition, like a man dressed in a long dark robe, approached, and said slowly and distinctly, 'Come with me.' I was almost startled by his peremptory and unnatural manner, but there was nothing to do but obey.

"I arose and quickly followed him. We entered a large empty room. It was very large—miles in length, I thought. The sides were completely lined with bureaus.

"I noticed that the bureaus were high and full of drawers. Some of these were closed; some partly

shut and others wide open. A strange, unnatural feeling came over me. I was so impressed with the immensity and stillness of the room that I turned, saying faintly to the guide :

"'I—I think I will go home.'

"He smiled and said, 'Not yet.'

"'What does it all mean?' I asked.

"'These drawers,' said my guide, 'are the lives of God's creatures. Each bureau represents a family, each drawer a human life. Some, as you see, are closed, never to be opened in this life. Others are nearly closed, which means that the Master's coming is near at hand. Those that are wide open are in the morning or noonday of their earthly stay. If you walk about and examine the contents you can see the character of each life. The reputation is what you can see from here—the outside. Look about before we take our tour of inspection.'

"'Tour of inspection!' Where had I heard that before? Why, those were the very words I had so often used to Ida. Ida! What Ida? Everything seemed far away, but soon my mind cleared. I looked carefully from where I stood at the outside of these drawers. Some were beautiful—smoothly polished and without a scratch on the surface. Others were marred by careless usage, varnish rubbed off, knocks here and there that had taken more than the varnish—they had made deep dents in the wood.

"'It is not very difficult,' said my guide, 'to keep the outside, the reputation, as good as new. Only be a little careful not to get the varnish off, for it's hard to get it back to look like new; and as for these dents that you see, they are deep and always are likely to show. There is a kind of filling that has often been used, and it makes the surface so like the original that often the place of the dent is seen only by looking closely. In certain lights, though, the scars cannot be hid and the sham filling stands out plainly. You'll notice that you can't always tell from the outside how the drawer will look in-

side. Some of the best polished and most handsome ones are really the worst ones of all. Now we'll look into a few that are opened.'

"Many were in great disorder. I noticed that there was a good deal of what seemed altogether unnecessary, in fact out of place. 'Take away the rubbish and have some system about what is left, and there is plenty of room.' How familiar the words sounded! Why, they were the very words Ida had used, but when? It seemed years ago.

"One thing I noticed in my strange journey. Every drawer had some one package larger than all the others, so large that it was recognized at once as the chief thing in the drawer. The contents, as I said, were various, but there was always present this large package and I seemed to see at once the label written plainly on the side. One read, 'Love of this world.' The package was transparent and I could see the contents. Beautiful dresses, jewelry, invitations to parties, dancing, love of praise,—some of the things perfectly harmless in themselves, but O how much room they took up! 'That's the trouble,' said my guide. 'See, this drawer scarcely has room for the Bible.' I looked for it and could not find it for some time. There it was, way off in a corner, packed out of sight. Another drawer that I remembered had its chief package labeled, 'Love of money.' I thought at first this drawer had nothing else in it but I saw on closer inspection quite a number of small, insignificant articles all thrown in disorderly. Another drawer had a large bundle called 'Selfishness;' another of 'Ambition,' and so on. I noticed that the more nearly closed a drawer was, the larger was the chief bundle. 'It keeps growing,' said the guide, 'larger every day or smaller. It never remains the same.'

"We came to one drawer that my guide looked at lovingly. I saw that it belonged to one of my friends—a dear old lady of three-score years and ten. The drawer was nearly closed and all was in readiness. No confusion here. 'Set in order, set in

order,' said my guide. There was the large package, and it read, 'Love for those for whom Christ died.' Suddenly as I gazed a wondrous transformation took place. A heavenly light illumined the words and they read now, 'Love for the Master.' 'The label is still the same,' said my guide, 'the meaning has not changed. Now let us look at yours.'

"'No, O no, not yet, please. I dare not.'

"I tried wildly to shut my eyes, and then—I awoke. There was my own room. There was my own bureau. How happy, happy that I had my life, some of it, left. I, Mrs. Ashmead, excellent Christian woman as I had proudly thought myself, wanted more time to throw away the rubbish, arrange things properly, and then I knew there would be plenty of room. Room for what? Room for the missionary meeting, but more, room for more Christlikeness—a genuine interest in those for whom God gave his Son. I could, I would do something. I got up and kneeled down in the moonlight by the window and thanked God for that dream. *He* sent it, dear, to show me my mistake.

"Wednesday it rained and the wind blew a perfect gale, but I went to the missionary meeting. I doubt if a cyclone could have kept me at home. I've been ever since—I love to go. I'm trying with the dear Lord's help to throw away the rubbish, to put things in order. It's missionary day to-morrow, Mrs. Stowe. Will you go with me?"

"Yes, I will," said Mrs. Stowe, softly but firmly. "I'll go," and she went.

Sisters, will *you* go?

A. N. YOUNG.

No. 216—1st Ed.—5, 1900. Price, 1 cent each; 75c. per 100.